

Collaborative Environmental Problem-Solving: *An Evaluation of EPA's Experience*

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Background

- Evolution in environmental governance
 - Traditional command & control
 - Emerging collaborative approaches
- Agency collaboration knowledge
 - Pockets of practitioner experience
 - Social science expertise limited
- Review of Agency experience
 - Identify keys to success/overarching principles
 - Inform subsequent Agency action

Methods

- Solicited & reviewed illustrative case examples
- Reviewed literature reviews
- Reviewed EPA gray literature
- Participatory review of straw draft

Findings

Keys to successful collaboration

1. Shared environmental problem
2. Convener of stature
3. Committed leader
4. Representatives of substance
5. Clearly-defined purpose
6. Formal charter
7. Common information base

Findings: Getting started

1. Shared environmental problem –

motivates stakeholders to collaborate when all parties would benefit by solving a problem, but no single party has the capacity or incentive to do so.

2. Convener of Stature –

catalyzes collaborative problem-solving by legitimizing the process, encouraging stakeholder participation, & shouldering initial organizational costs to bring parties together.

Findings: Who's at the table?

3. Committed Leader –

sustains a group by reiterating the benefits of collective, coordinated action; the drawbacks of independent, uncoordinated action; and by emphasizing the personal commitments that participants have made to each other and to the collaborative process.

4. Representatives of substance –

can implement timely solutions to a problem because they have sufficient authority to decide on behalf of, or sufficiently influence, their represented interest and who collectively, by virtue of prominence, role, or market share.

Findings: Clarity of focus & process

5. Clearly-Defined Purpose –

makes collaborative efforts more likely to succeed, because “bounded” problems are more easily overcome than large “fuzzy” issues.

6. Formal Charter –

fosters successful collaborative problem-solving by reducing the uncertainties and ambiguities among collaborating parties that can cause conflict and, thus, enhancing participants’ confidence in each other and the collaborative process as a whole.

Findings: Creating common ground

7. **Common information base –**

enables collaborators to develop a shared understanding of the problem and possible solutions, facilitating development of viable, legitimate policy solutions. Information asymmetries (i.e., different actors hold different information) exacerbate power inequalities and foster conflict among collaborators.

Implications for EPA

- Target priority problems.
- Convene strategically.
- Provide necessary capacity.
- Enable early, ongoing, and meaningful stakeholder involvement.
- Frame problems judiciously.
- Establish realistic goals, timelines, and performance measures.
- Engage in joint fact finding.

Moving forward

- Released evaluation internally & externally
 - “all hands” EPA memo
 - Distributed to State Commissioners
- Discussions of next steps
 - SES National Meeting
 - Organizational listening sessions
- Developing action plan